
Update on stem cell treatments for spinal cord injury

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A nod to Paul Knoepfler at UC Davis, who has posted a blog entry about the Geron trial for spinal cord injury. It provides a nice summary of the science behind the trial, and a reminder of why patients might be hard to recruit. He refers to Michael Martinez, a jockey who recently sustained a severe spinal cord injury, and who was rejected for participation in Geron's trial developed from human embryonic stem cells. As Knoepfler points out:

“ An important element of this treatment, as highlighted by the recent case with Martinez, is that the injury has to be of a certain kind to be treatable using Geron's approach. If too severe, the animal models would suggest the treatment won't help. In addition, the treatment must be given within 1-2 weeks of the injury.

We recently released a video about stem cell therapies for spinal cord injury, featuring CIRM board member Oswald Steward who directs the Reeve-Irvine Research Center at UC Irvine. CIRM funds several spinal cord injury research projects at that center, including some with Hans Keirstead who first developed the therapy being tested by Geron.

While talking with Dr. Steward for that video he discussed hopes for a therapy that would be effective after that first 1-2 week window. His lab recently showed that in rodents, neurons could be nudged to regrow over the site of an older injury (here's the UCI press release). Another group at UC Irvine found that human neural stem cells restored some mobility to mice that were in the chronic stages of spinal cord injury (here's our blog entry on that work).

You can learn more about CIRM work toward a stem cell based therapy for spinal cord injury on our Spinal Cord Injury Stem Cell Fact Sheet.

Tags: University of California Irvine, Steward, Keirstead, spinal cord injury

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